



Chapter 2

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

2.1 Careful Planning is Key

Procurement actions cannot be carried out successfully without sufficient planning and preparation by the agency. Planning lays the groundwork for an efficient and effective process. It provides information that enables staff to decide how best to accomplish the procurement, what specific actions need to be taken to obtain the service, and how to assure contract performance is accomplished to meet program requirements. Advance planning also provides the means for an agency to assure it is in full compliance with state statutes, regulations, policies and procedures. Good analysis, good thinking, and good planning are the best ways to ensure selection of a qualified consultant.

2.2 Define Your Needs

In the initial stage of planning, the agency should develop a clear perception and description of the need.

Defining the need contributes to effective prioritization of the funding required, a common understanding within the agency of the need, and the identification of the nature of the work and the level of service required to meet the need. Defining the need also contributes to the determination of how performance and quality will be measured. The ability to specify and convey what is needed forms the basis for obtaining a fair and reasonable price while selecting the best-qualified contractor.

Two questions must be answered: 1) Is there a real need for the service? and 2) If there is a real need or problem, what is the most feasible method to resolve it? Answers to these questions should become clear in the process of developing a work statement. The work statement should begin with a clear definition of the issue, need, or problem, and be supplemented with comprehensive background information regarding the work needed. This affords management an instrument by which to weigh all options.

2.3 Get Management Support

Management's buy-off of the project is another step required to proceed beyond the planning phase. Each agency will proceed in this phase according to its own internal processes. Management will play a key role in preparing the agency for the project. This support will:

- Clarify what the consultant will be doing.
- Prepare staff to assist the consultant.
- Improve the consultant's productivity.
- Minimize the inconvenience and disruption to staff due to the consultant's presence.
- Establish responsibility for post-contract decisions, wherein the consultant's recommendations are implemented.

2.4 Why Use a Consultant?

Agencies use consultants to meet needs or to address specific problems when internal resources are not available. Consultants have historically been used to provide:

Specialized Skills, Knowledge and Resources – An agency might engage a professional consultant to focus greater specialized knowledge and technical skill on a problem than can be provided by internal staff. A qualified consultant will possess the body of knowledge, skills and techniques in a given area of specialization.

Broad Experience – While each agency's situation is in some respects unique, few problems are completely without precedent to professional consultants. An experienced consultant has learned to anticipate problems and draw from techniques developed in similar situations for solving the problems. Often a consultant can offer an agency previously tested solutions to chronic operational or technical problems.

Objectivity – One of the most valuable attributes of an outside consultant is objectivity. The consultant may offer an independent and impartial perspective which brings fresh and constructive insights into a situation.

Credibility – In some instances state agencies must present findings and recommendations to policy makers, such as the Governor, Legislature, commissions, etc. An independent qualified source can often bring credibility to an evaluation of the problem. Policy makers often value recommendations offered by reputable consultants with extensive expertise and stature in their fields.

Timeliness – A consultant can devote a concentrated effort to an identified problem without the distractions of daily operating responsibilities. This is particularly important when a deadline for a project has been established and staff schedules and other work assignments conflict with the project completion date.

Innovation – A consultant can fill an important role in advocating change. Occasionally, solutions fail internally because vested interests, internal loyalties, tradition or pre-conceptions promote resistance to change. An effective consultant can offer innovative suggestions and inform decision makers of the benefits of creative approaches to long-standing problems.

If agency management determines that a project is warranted, the statement of need will provide direction to potential consultants. The statement of need will also be useful in establishing a basis for evaluating the consultants' proposals.

2.5 Cost/Benefit Analysis

The second step in justifying a contract is to assess need versus the cost of obtaining desired results. This cost/benefit analysis enables agency management to determine very early if a project is warranted and to identify the specific benefits that will be obtained by the project. This analysis acknowledges that any benefit has an associated cost, not only in consulting fees, but also from possible changes in agency systems, procedures, and techniques requiring staff training, new equipment or special management attention.

The agency, at this point, should define what is expected from a consultant to achieve the identified benefits. Issues to consider include:

- *What level of technical expertise is needed?*
- *When is the service required?*
- *How is the consultant to approach the problem or task?*
- *Where is the service to be delivered?*
- *What products should the consultant deliver?*

The cost of private consulting services is dependent upon a combination of factors, including:

- *Scope and depth of the task*
- *Urgency for delivery*
- *Level of expertise required*
- *Availability of qualified consultants*
- *Reputation and professional stature of the consultant*
- *Risk associated with the project*
- *Experience level of the project*
- *Project travel and related costs*

Potential benefits of contracting for services may include:

- *Savings to state government and taxpayers*
- *Expertise in areas not currently available*
- *Decrease in workload and equipment requirements*
- *Ability to meet geographic needs*

2.6 Available Funding

One of the most important considerations to be addressed during the planning process is the availability of sufficient funding to cover the project expenditures. Adequate funding based on

in-house cost projections must be verified by the contract manager. If funding is inadequate or non-existent, the project cannot proceed.

When funding is available, the type of appropriation should be considered. For state agencies whose funds are appropriated for a fiscal year or biennial period, those funds cannot be disbursed for work performed in a subsequent period.

In addition to the identified costs associated with contracting for personal services, contract managers should also consider overhead expenses, such as costs for staff involvement with contract development, contract management, monitoring and internal fiscal processes, training, legal review of the contract, and dispute resolution.

2.7 Available Public Resources

After the required service is defined, agencies must determine the availability of qualified public resources before considering a private consultant. RCW 39.29.008 (2) and (3) prohibits entering into personal services until an agency can document that public resources are not available. Technical expertise may be available from a variety of sources, such as:

- Employees within the agency.
- Other state, federal, and local agencies that have conducted similar projects, encountered similar problems, or have similar functional responsibilities.
- Other Washington State agencies with specialized professional expertise.

2.8 Legal Constraints to Contracting

Certain legal requirements must be carefully considered before contracting for outside consulting services.

Traditional State Work – State agencies should not contract if the needed service constitutes work traditionally performed by state employees and for which state employees are available. (Washington State Supreme Court ruling in *Washington Federation of State Employees v. Spokane Community College*, 90 Wn.2d 698, 1978)

Termination of Classified Employees – The contract should not be entered into if execution of a contract would have the effect of terminating classified employees or classified employee positions currently existing at the time of the execution or renewal of the contract. (RCW 41.06.380)

Collective Bargaining – A personal service contract should not be awarded if contracting would adversely affect any collective bargaining agreements.

The agency should seek legal advice from the Assistant Attorney General regarding these or similar situations where legal requirements are uncertain.

2.9 Access to Data

RCW 39.29.080 prohibits state agencies from entering into personal service contracts when the contractor could charge additional costs to the agency, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, or the Office of the State Auditor for access to data generated under the contract. For the purposes of this requirement, “data” includes all information that supports the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the contractor’s reports, including computer models and methodology for those models.

2.10 Merit System Alternatives to Contracting

Merit system rules also provide alternatives to personal service contracting. The following items provide a brief definition of options available. For additional information, contact your agency Personnel Office or the Department of Personnel.

Emergency Appointments – Emergency appointments can be made for up to 30 calendar days, may be made on short notice, and do not require that the employee meet minimum qualifications.

Temporary Appointments – Temporary appointments may last for no more than nine months total for any single or multiple appointments within a continuous 12-month period. The employee must meet the minimum qualifications for the job class.

Intermittent Appointments – Intermittent appointments may be made for up to 1,560 hours during any consecutive 12-month period, but they may not be used for regular full-time work. Intermittent appointments are used when there is no particular pattern or predictable schedule. The appointee must meet the minimum qualifications for the job class.

Part-time Appointments – Appointments may be made on a part-time basis, as needed, but must be referred from a register. These are permanent appointments into civil service. The employee must meet minimum qualifications for the job class.

Project Appointments – Project appointments may be made when the length of employment is contingent on state, federal or other grant funding for specific and non-continuing projects. Appointees must meet minimum qualifications for the job class. Appointees are terminated when funding for the project ends. Projects are approved and established by the Department of Personnel and normally last up to two years.

WMS Appointments – The Washington Management Service (WMS) also provides for non-permanent, acting appointments which may be made when necessary to meet an agency’s organizational needs.

Contracts for services that appear to have any of the following elements should be reviewed by the agency personnel office or Assistant Attorney General to determine the appropriateness of award. This includes any contract that:

- Circumvents or avoids the competitive employment procedures of the state civil service system.
- Performs a job that a classified employee can do.
- Performs a job that could be accomplished by resources within the agency or other state agencies.
- Creates a full-time, continuous position.

2.11 Using State Certified Minority- and Women-Owned Firms

RCW 39.19 requires agencies and educational institutions to ensure that businesses owned and controlled by minorities (MBEs) and women (WBEs) are afforded the maximum practical opportunity to contract directly and/or to subcontract with the state and to meaningfully participate on state contracts. The Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises (OMWBE) sets annual voluntary participation goals for agencies and educational institutions by class of contract. Currently, the overall goals for personal (professional) services are 10 percent for MBEs and 4 percent for WBEs. OMWBE may be contacted at (360) 753-9697 for information or assistance in locating certified minority- or women-owned businesses.

Goals may be established for individual competitive procurements, but the procurement document must state that the goals for MBE and/or WBE participation are **voluntary**. No preferences for MBE and/or WBE participation will be included in scoring of the proposals, no minimum level of MWBE participation shall be required as a condition for receiving an award, and proposals will not be rejected or considered non-responsive for not including MWBE participation.

While the goals are voluntary for state agencies, achievement of the goals is encouraged. When goals are included in the solicitation document, consultants are to include in their proposals the names of any minority and/or women-owned firms they plan to involve. Only firms that are certified by OMWBE will count toward the goals. Proposals should also include the percentage or dollar value of the work and a description of the services the MBE and/or WBE firm(s) will be providing.

Contract specifications may provide that the contractor report the MBE and WBE participation to the awarding agency indicating the amount paid to the firm(s) and the nature of the services performed. Agencies, in turn, report payments made to the certified firms through either the on-line Agency Financial Reporting System or through their own electronic medium in a format approved by OMWBE.

Failure to comply with MBE and WBE contract provisions may result in termination of the contract.

2.12 Independent Status of Contractor

An essential criterion in the use of personal services is the independent entrepreneurial relationship between the contractor and the agency. Agencies could potentially be subject to payment of fines by the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Administration, if a determination of "employee" status is made regarding the agency's contracts.

Federal employment tax regulations essentially convey that every individual is an employee, if under the usual common law rules the relationship between the individual and the person for whom services are performed is the legal relationship of employee/employer. Generally, such a relationship is considered to exist when the person for whom services are performed has the right to control and direct the individual who performs the services, not only as to the result to be accomplished, but also as to the details and means by which the result is accomplished. It is not necessary that the employer direct or control the manner in which the services are performed, rather it is sufficient that the employer has the right to do so.

After consulting with your own agency staff, contract managers may want to consider consulting with the Office of the Attorney General or the OFM Accounting Division to ensure this determination is made correctly.

2.13 Performance Measures and Outcomes

Agencies may want to consider whether performance measures and outcomes should be identified. The purpose of performance measures is to provide a standard or measure for performance of the contracted services. Performance measures are also used to determine if, and when, the contractor has successfully completed performance, and when and how much the contractor should be paid.

Contract performance measures may:

- Define the standards for measuring contractor performance.
- Provide a means to monitor performance.
- Measure satisfaction with the contractor.
- Provide data for program evaluation.

When developing performance measures, consideration should be given in advance to how the data is to be submitted, analyzed, and maintained. Key questions to consider include:

- ✓ How much information can reasonably be requested, submitted, and analyzed?
- ✓ How often and on what schedule must the data be reported?
- ✓ How will the information be submitted?
- ✓ Who will receive the information?
- ✓ How will feedback be provided to the contractor?
- ✓ What is the cost and benefit of each proposed performance measure?

Characteristics of good performance measures:

- Are easily understood by contractors, state agencies, and the general public.
- Focus on the performance expected from the contractor.
- Are well defined and consider both the quantitative (how much?) and qualitative (how well?) aspects of performance.
- Include a well-defined method for reporting data.
- Are relevant, timely, and verifiable.
- Are realistic in terms of available resources, funding and timelines, and recognize external factors beyond the control of the system.

Contract managers should check the funding source(s) or statutory authority to determine whether any specific outcomes are mandated. Then, consider the follow questions:

- How will you know the service has actually been provided (other than taking the contractor's word for it)?
- Are you concerned about the *quality* of the service? If so, include a mechanism for measuring quality.
- Are you looking for a specific outcome?
- Is payment contingent on an event, product, or outcome? If so, how will you ascertain that the contractor has satisfied the requirement? If not, consider tying payment to an event, product, or outcome.